

America's VetDogs -
the veteran's K-9 Corps

Therapy dogs deployed to Iraq on historic mission

Sgts. 1st Class Boe and Budge are two black Labrador retrievers on an extraordinary mission.

For the first time in the history of the U.S. Army, skilled therapy dogs, provided by America's VetDogs, have deployed to Iraq to help Soldiers in the field deal with combat and home-front stress.

For Maj. Stacie Caswell, commander of the 85th Medical Detachment and a driving force for the therapy dogs, Boe and Budge are another way members of the combat stress control teams can help their fellow Soldiers break down the stigma associated with asking for help.

In December, two staff sergeants from the 85th Medical Det. were temporarily assigned to New York from Iraq to train with the dogs; Boe and Budge were officially presented to the Army at a special ceremony.

The dogs returned with their new handlers to Iraq and started work immediately. As members of the CSC units, Boe and Budge accompany their handlers as they work with Soldiers, whether in a one-on-one or group setting, to cope with homefront issues, sleep problems or day-to-day operational stress. The canines help provide emotional comfort through physical interactions such as playing fetch or simple petting.

"The dogs have a natural, uncanny way of reducing stress. It's kind of magical," said Budge's first handler, whose unit returned from Iraq in April 2008.

Boe and Budge are now with the 528th Medical Det. Before they were deployed to replace the 85th, members of the 528th spent four days at America's VetDogs headquarters to learn dog-handling techniques.

America's VetDogs is proud to be called to serve the valiant men and women who serve our country and honored to make the gift of these special canines to the Army.

As a subsidiary of the Guide Dog Foundation for the Blind, America's VetDogs offers guide and service dogs to veterans of all eras. A major component of the program is to provide service dogs to members of the military recently wounded in combat.

America's VetDogs participates in the Combined Federal Campaign as a member of the Human Service Charities of America federation.



AMERICA'S VETDOGS-THE VETERAN'S K-9 CORPS

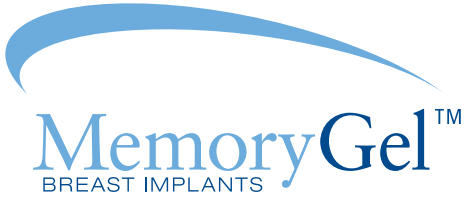
Boe and Budge train with their handlers before they deploy to Iraq. The two black Labrador retrievers help the deployed Soldiers by providing emotional comfort through physical interactions such as playing fetch or simple petting. "The dogs have a natural, uncanny way of reducing stress," said Budge's first handler.



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Photo by Christopher Appoldt

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Amigo Airsho parking, gate closures outlined

Gate changes occurring during this year's Amigo Airsho include Robert E. Lee Gate closing to through traffic and opening to Amigo Airsho patrons from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday and Sunday. Jeb Stuart South Gate will open to out-bound traffic from 8 a.m. to 9 p.m. Saturday and Sunday.

There are four parking areas on Fort Bliss with dedicated bus transportation to this year's Amigo Airsho.

Public parking: Anyone going to the Airsho (military or civilian) can park at the designated parking lot immediate-

ly south of the Robert E. Lee Gate. Buses provided by the Amigo Airsho will transport patrons to the event's entrance.

Decal parking: Military personnel with a DoD decal may park at the designated parking area immediately north of the Stafford Dining Facility (corner of Carrington and Stennis roads). The post shuttle bus will transport military ID cardholders from this parking lot to the event.

Corporate Chalet parking: Personnel with a corporate parking pass

will enter Chaffee Gate and park parallel to Earl H. Bruns, between Chaffee and Carrington streets. Buses provided by the Amigo Airsho will transport patrons to the event.

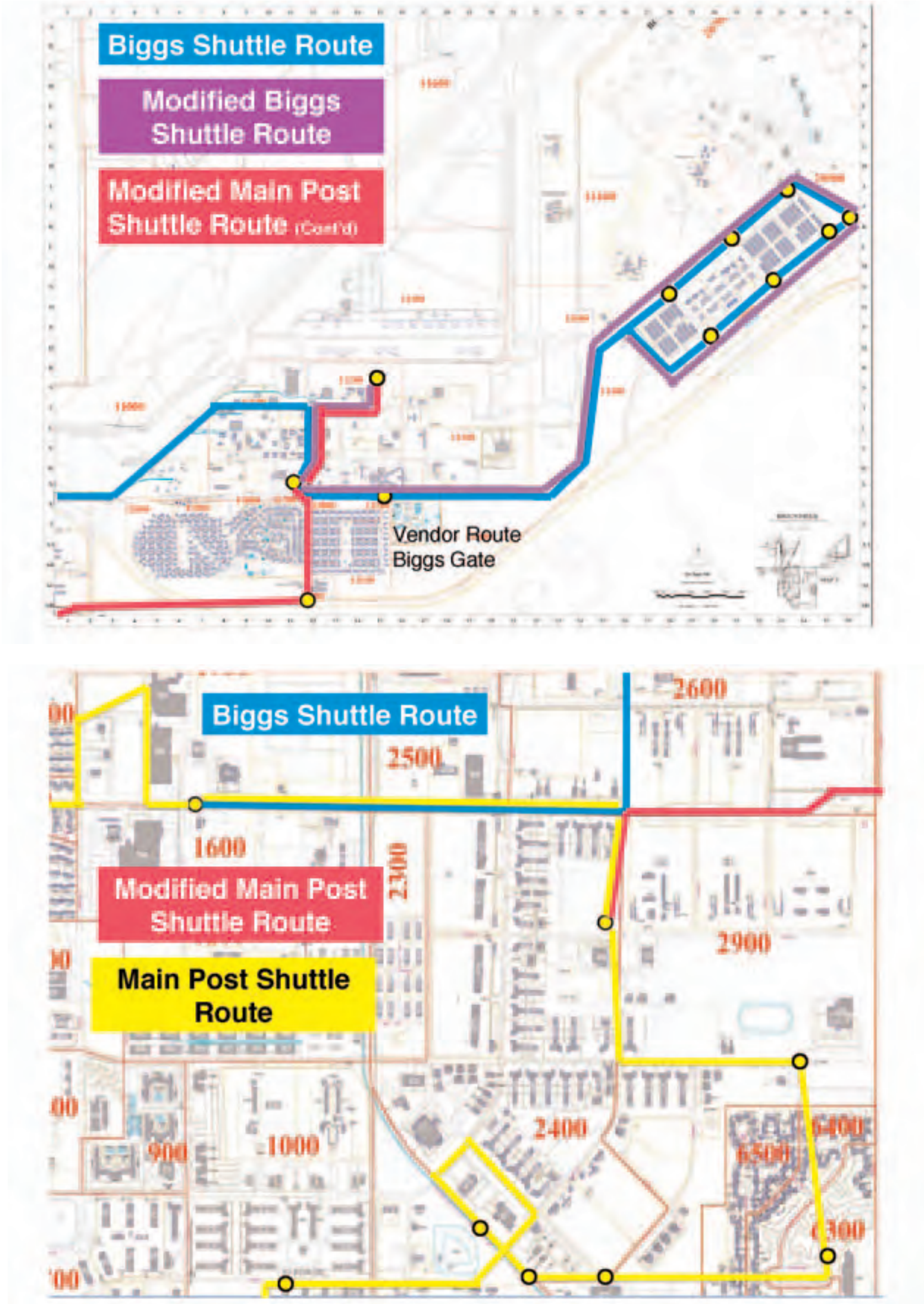
Handicapped parking: Personnel with handicapped decals will also enter Chaffee Gate and park parallel to Shannon Van Valzah Street, between Chaffee and Carrington streets. Buses provided by the Amigo Airsho will transport patrons to the entrance of the event.

There are parking areas on East Fort

Bliss for DoD-registered vehicles located at the Centennial Club. The post shuttle bus will transport military ID cardholders from this parking lot to the Airsho entrance.

The post shuttle bus will also transport Soldiers living in 1-1 and 4-1 AD barracks to the Airsho entrance.

Only military ID card holders will ride buses provided by the Directorate of Logistics.





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Personal Security

If You See Something, Say Something!

Surveillance

Are you aware of anyone recording or monitoring activities, taking notes, using cameras, maps, binoculars, etc. near a critical facility?

Suspicious Persons

Are you aware of anyone who does not appear to belong in the workplace, neighborhood, business establishment or in the vicinity of a critical facility?

Dry Runs

Have you observed any behavior that appears to be preparation for terrorist activity, such as mapping out routes, playing out scenarios with other people, monitoring important facilities, timing traffic lights or traffic flow, or other suspicious activities?

Tests of Security

Are you aware of any attempts to penetrate or test physical security or security force measures at Fort Bliss?

Courtesy: Federal Bureau of Investigations

History has shown that surveillance is conducted prior to terrorist acts.

Terrorists must expose themselves and their activities to conduct surveillance. That is our chance to detect any suspicious activity prior to a possible attack.

These seven indicators are intended to assist you in identifying suspicious activity.

If You See Something, Say Something!

Military Police	568-2116
CID	568-1700
FBI	832-5000

Acquiring Supplies

Are you aware of anyone attempting to improperly acquire explosives, weapons, ammunition, dangerous chemicals, uniforms, badges, flight manuals, identification cards for a key facility or to legally obtain items under suspicious circumstances that could be used in a terrorist attack?

Deploying Assets

Have you observed stockpiling of suspicious materials, persons being deployed or abandoned vehicles near a key facility?

Suspicious Questioning

Are you aware of anyone attempting to gain information in person, by phone, mail, e-mail, etc. regarding Fort Bliss?

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YALONDA WRIGHT

Spc. Woong Jang, medic, HHB, 1st Bn., 43rd ADA, 11th ADA Bde.; Spc. Leonardo Martinez, infantryman, 4th Bn., 6th Inf., 4th BCT, 1st AD; Spc. Peter Etabo, supply specialist, 121st BSB; Pvt. Andy Fernandez, mechanic, 3rd Bn., 43rd ADA; Spc. James Jannah, logistical specialist, HHD, 93rd MP Bn.; and Spc. Chak Huon, mechanic, 121st BSB, all Soldiers naturalized as U.S. citizens in a federal ceremony Sept. 24, pose for a group photo following the event.

Servicemembers become U.S. citizens at downtown ceremony

YALONDA WRIGHT

Monitor Staff

Twenty servicemembers, along with 1,210 other applicants, were naturalized as U.S. citizens during a federal ceremony Sept. 24.

The El Paso field office of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services held the massive ceremony, at the El Paso Convention and Performing Arts Center, with applicants from 57 different countries.

District Judge Philip R. Martinez opened court and administered the oath of allegiance after the presentation of the new citizens. El Paso Field Office Director Raymond P. Adams led the group in the pledge of allegiance, which was followed by the national anthem and the 62nd Army Band playing “God Bless America.” The new citizens then watched a congratulatory video message from President George W. Bush. Bush assured them that with a single oath, they had become as fully American as the most direct citizens of the country’s native fathers.

Guest speaker for the occasion was USCIS Chief of Staff Thomas Paar. Paar began by congratulating the new citizens of “this great nation.”

“Beginning today, you are able to fully pursue your American dreams,” said Paar. “Citizenship is an invaluable distinction that involves much more than stamped paperwork and a printed document. Citizenship is an identity that must be cultivated and nurtured by the individual.”

Paar then encouraged the newly natu-

ralized citizens to commit to their new country by giving back to the community.

In a separate acknowledgement, Paar addressed the military’s newest U.S. citizens. He assured them that they had taken the concept of service to a much higher level.

“Having no obligation at all to serve,” said Paar, “literally above and beyond the call [of duty], you have chosen to do so. You stepped forward and offered yourself to this nation, and greater love has no man or woman.”

In conjunction with the ceremony, two civilian workers at Fort Bliss received awards from the USCIS for their contributions to the Department of Homeland Security in support of the Soldiers and the war on terrorism.

Cher Poehlein, Army Community Service relocation program manager, received a certificate of appreciation for her support of citizenship and immigration issues for more than 500 family members since the war on terror began.

Brandie Watson, a human resource assistant for the Directorate of Human Resources, was awarded a certificate of appreciation for supporting active-duty, Reserve and National Guard Soldiers while processing more than 1,500 naturalization applications for servicemembers here since 2005.

“I was surprised to hear about the award,” said Watson. “It was nice and I am grateful, but the biggest award is being able to change someone’s life for the better.”

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PFC. CHRISTOPHER MCKENNA

A student sits with his certificate after graduating from the fourth and final class at the Village of Hope training center at Patrol Base Stone, Iraq, Sept. 25.

Village of Hope training center graduates final class

PFC. CHRISTOPHER MCKENNA

Special to American Forces Press Service

PATROL BASE STONE, Iraq — A program designed to help “Sons of Iraq” citizen security group members learn skills that will enable them to help Iraq move forward graduated its final class of 60 students here Sept. 25.

“The Village of Hope was part of a civil service corps program that took Sons of Iraq members from checkpoints and taught them useable trades that they can make a living with,” said Air Force Capt. Michael Askegren, 557th Expeditionary RED HORSE Squadron’s officer in charge for the program. RED HORSE stands for Rapid Engineer Deployable Heavy Operational Repair Squadron Engineers.

As Iraq’s security forces continue to grow and mature, some Sons of Iraq members will be able to serve with the army or police. But for the majority who won’t, “the Village of Hope gives them an option to make a good living in legitimate ways,” Askegren said.

The first of four Village of Hope classes graduated in May. Askegren said he noted progress with each class.

“When it started off, we had to build trust within the community and get them to believe that we are here to help and teach them something they can use,” he said. “Each class has steadily gotten better, and it all culminated with the graduation of the final class.”

The day also saw the official reopening of the Almainn School for Boys,

which was remodeled through construction efforts of both contractors and Village of Hope graduates.

“Iraqi service workers did all of the work on the school,” said Air Force Tech. Sgt. Michael McKeen, the RED HORSE squadron’s structure lead noncommissioned officer. “After their training, we put them straight to work. In the beginning, we had to do a lot of hands-on training with them, but after we got their first group of supervisors through their course, they kind of filled in our role.”

The sharpest individuals from each class were placed into a supervisors’ course, where they learned supervisory skills and responsibilities.

“Having actual supervisors out on the construction sites allowed [the coalition] to take a step back and let Iraqis train Iraqis,” McKeen said.

Since the inception of the Village of Hope, four classes that yielded a total of 210 graduates trained in construction, plumbing and electrical wiring. The supervisors learned to coordinate necessities and maintain equipment for the various trades.

Although no additional classes will be offered at the Village of Hope, Askegren said good things lie ahead for Hawr Rajab.

“Though the training is complete, there are still renovations left to be done in the community,” he said. “We’ve officially planted the seed to a new future. Now, it’s time for us to step back and watch it grow.”

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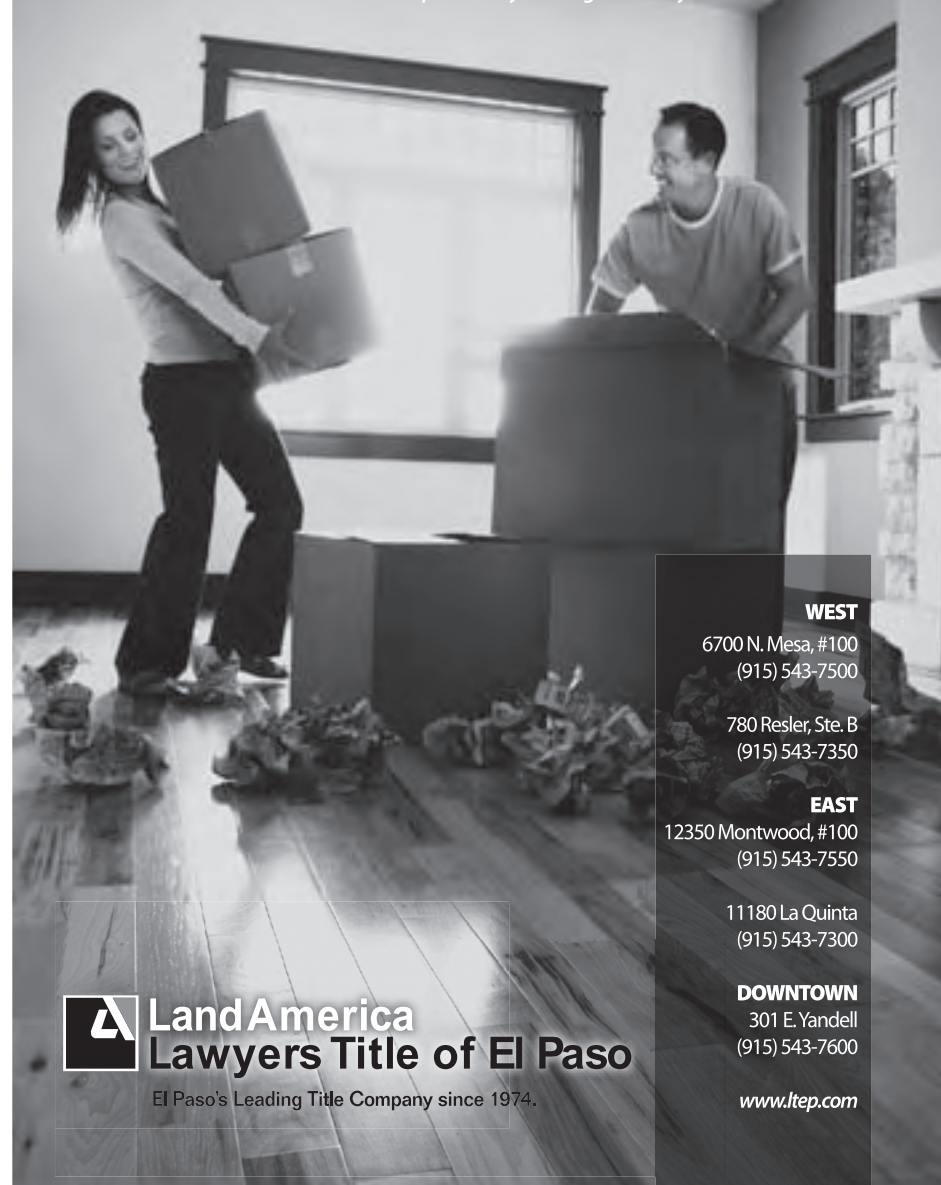
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Father, daughter train for Iraq deployment

SPC. ELIZABETH GORENC

American Forces Press Service

BUTLERVILLE, Ind. – Overseas deployments usually call upon Soldiers to temporarily leave loved ones behind. But here, two members of the Hempstead family are preparing to mobilize together.

First Sgt. Bob Hempstead and his daughter, Pfc. Crystal Hempstead – members of the Indiana National Guard’s 1313th Engineer Company, based on Camp Atterbury in Edinburgh, Ind. – are scheduled to deploy to Iraq in early 2009. They are conducting pre-mobilization training with their unit at Muscatatuck Urban Training Center here in south central Indiana.

Wanting to gain overseas experience, Crystal said she transferred into the unit and volunteered for the upcoming deployment. The fact that her father would be her first sergeant had no bearing on her decision to join the unit, she said.

“I knew there was a war going on when I made the choice to enlist,” she said. “I also wanted to deploy right after basic combat training and advanced individual training to gain experience to be a better Soldier. So joining this unit and deploying with them seemed like the perfect option.”

Training and working together in the same environment at MUTC is nothing new to the Hempsteads. Bob is the senior operations noncom-

missioned officer at the training center, while Crystal also works at the center as the administrative assistant for Col. Chris Kelsey.

Their experiences working together in a military environment prevented them from walking blindly into training together, Bob said.

“We had a talk before we came here about keeping our family life and military life separate,” he said. “As first sergeant, I have 180 Soldiers and it’s important to treat everyone equally and be professional.”

Even though the Hempsteads train together, they rarely see each other due to their busy schedules.

“Training has been great so far and troop morale is really high,” Crystal said. “Not only is it fun, but it’s great to know that you can complete something like clearing houses and know that your buddy has your back.”

The engineer company is the first unit group to conduct pre-mobilization training at center, Bob said.

“It was pretty easy to set up training at MUTC for our unit since I work with operations here,” he said. “We hope to set the way for other units to eventually complete pre-mobilization training through here.”

Training consisted of land navigation, bomb detection, military operations on urban terrain, and driver’s training and combatives.

The second portion of the company’s training is



SPC. ELIZABETH GORENC

First Sgt. Bob Hempstead, 1313th Engineer Company, and his daughter Pfc. Crystal Hempstead, a light-wheel vehicle mechanic for the 1313th, will deploy together early next year. Their unit is currently at Muscatatuck Urban Training Center on Camp Atterbury, Ind., conducting pre-mobilization training.

scheduled to take place at Camp Atterbury. There, they will conduct weapons qualifications and range skills training.

Both Hempsteads said that the overall unit cohesion, high morale and skills honed at MUTC transfers through the rest of their training and deployment.

(Spc. Elizabeth Gorenc is assigned to Camp Atterbury Public Affairs.)

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Face of Defense: Deployed mechanic comforted by mixed cultures

2ND LT. ANTHONY ASCIUTTO

Special to American Forces Press Service

FORWARD OPERATING BASE KALSU, Iraq – For new servicemembers, a military job – not to mention an overseas deployment – can be a big adjustment. But for Pvt. Salim Jamal Srouji, both are familiar territory.

Srouji, 22, grew up in a diverse household in Norco, Calif. He traveled the world with his family and, in his spare time, enjoyed rebuilding go-carts and scooters.

With wanderlust and an independent streak, he enlisted in the Army in January. In just nine months he found himself here, just south of Baghdad, working as a mechanic.

“I wanted to pay for college on my own, without anyone’s help,” Srouji said of his decision to enlist. “I wanted to do something good not only for myself, but for my country.”

Srouji joined the Automotive Maintenance Platoon of B Company, 703rd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, for the remainder of the unit’s deployment in support of Operation Iraqi Freedom. His section maintains and repairs more than 300 vehicles here.

Before his time with the Army, Srouji also worked in private security for NASCAR events, the Emmy Awards and neighborhoods in his native Southern California.

His father, an immigrant from Lebanon, brought



2ND LT. ANTHONY ASCIUTTO

Pvt. Salim Jamal Srouji, a mechanic for the Automotive Maintenance Platoon of B Company, 703rd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division, works on the rear axle of a vehicle in the motor pool on Forward Operating Base Kalsu, Iraq, Sept. 11.

Islamic and Middle Eastern ties to his household. His mother was born and raised as a Christian in Southern California.

“My parents each wanted me to be their own religion – one Muslim and one Christian,” Srouji said. “They told me to learn about both of them and then make up my own mind.”

Srouji attended Muslim school for a short time and learned some spoken and written Arabic as well as the basic foundations of Islam as a preschooler. He switched to public school in kindergarten and attended Corona/Norco Adult School to receive his General Educational Diploma in 2007.

Srouji’s education also took place outside the classroom. The cultural diversity at home took him around the world, visiting the Middle East and Europe. He traveled to France, Syria and Lebanon, seeing family and friends along the way. The focus of his travels, however, was to see historical and religious sites, including mosques, churches, monuments, palaces and ruins. With his father, mother and brother, Nader, Srouji learned of foreign lands by witnessing them.

Now as a U.S. Soldier in the Middle East, Srouji plans to work hard, assimilate into his mechanics team and contribute until the mission is complete.

“My friends call me the ‘motorhead,’” he said, due to his love of working on vehicles.

(Second Lt. Anthony Asciutto is assigned to the public affairs office of the 703rd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team, 3rd Infantry Division.)

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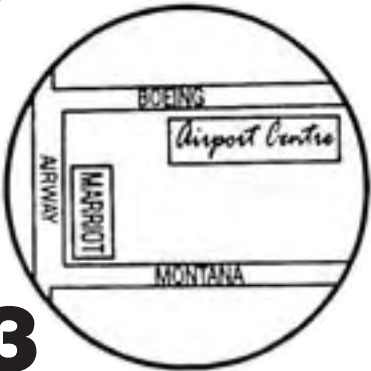
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War bride, military mom, Soldier serves in Iraq

SGT. DAVID TURNER

4th BCT, 3rd Inf. Div. Public Affairs

FORWARD OPERATING BASE KALSU, Iraq – Two years after the Army raised the maximum age for enlistees, it is not uncommon to find Soldiers over the age of 40 in the junior enlisted ranks.

Some served in their younger years; others just always wanted to serve. Still others followed in their children’s footsteps to the recruiting office.

Spc. Gina Keller, a war bride and a military mother in addition to being a Soldier, said her service is the realization of a dream she had for more than 20 years.

“I always wanted to join the service,” she said. “I tried at 18, but because of family values and respect for my family, I chose not to.”

Keller said her parents didn’t think joining the military was the right move for her at that time. In the meantime, she started a family of her own and put her dream of military service on hold. Her children – three sons and a daughter – came first, she said. But she always hoped the chance to serve would come again.

“I still knew that if someday it came around, that I could do it,” she said.

At age 40, Keller learned the age limit for enlistment had been raised to 39. She sought a waiver to join the National Guard, but was turned down.

“My heart was broken,” she said. “I thought I would never get to do this.”

Months passed. Then she heard the Army had raised the age limit again, to



SGT. DAVID TURNER

Spc. Gina Keller shares a meal with her husband, Sgt. Kevin Keller, at the Forward Operating Base Kalsu dining facility in Iraq.

42. An Army recruiter called her the next day and asked her if she still wanted to join.

“I was always hoping and praying somehow I’d make this goal, this dream, happen,” she said.

Her eldest son Isaac had just joined the National Guard, and mother and son shipped off to basic training within days of each other. He went to Fort Leonard Wood, Mo.; Keller left for Fort Jackson, S.C.

Despite the rigors of basic training, Keller proved herself in a group of younger recruits. Drill sergeants didn’t treat her any differently, she said, and

the female drill sergeants were the hardest on her.

“I was called ‘grandma’ and ‘old lady’ most of the time I was there,” she recalled, noting that her fellow Soldiers helped her manage the stress of the training.

After basic training, Keller completed her advanced individual training, qualifying as a wheeled-vehicle mechanic. Then, in a strange twist, she received orders to report to her new unit, 92nd Engineer Brigade – her son Andrew’s unit.

“He said, ‘You can’t be coming here.’ I said, ‘Yes, I am,’” she recalled

with a laugh. Keller said Andrew pleaded with his company’s first sergeant, “You can’t let that happen; I can’t have my mom here.”

Worries of standing next to mom in formation subsided right away. Andrew deployed to Iraq, expecting to return home in October 2007. He had not seen his mother in 18 months, and the day of his scheduled return turned out to be the day of his mother’s departure; she received orders to deploy to Iraq, too.

Things were happening fast for the 42-year-old single parent. She relocated with her youngest child, now 13, to Fort Stewart, Ga., and began preparing for a 15-month tour of duty in Iraq, assigned to the 3rd Infantry Division’s 703rd Brigade Support Battalion, 4th Brigade Combat Team. Her commander allowed her an extra 10 days before deploying to spend time with Andrew. Mother and son bonded in a new way; he helped her pack her bags and advised her on her upcoming journey.

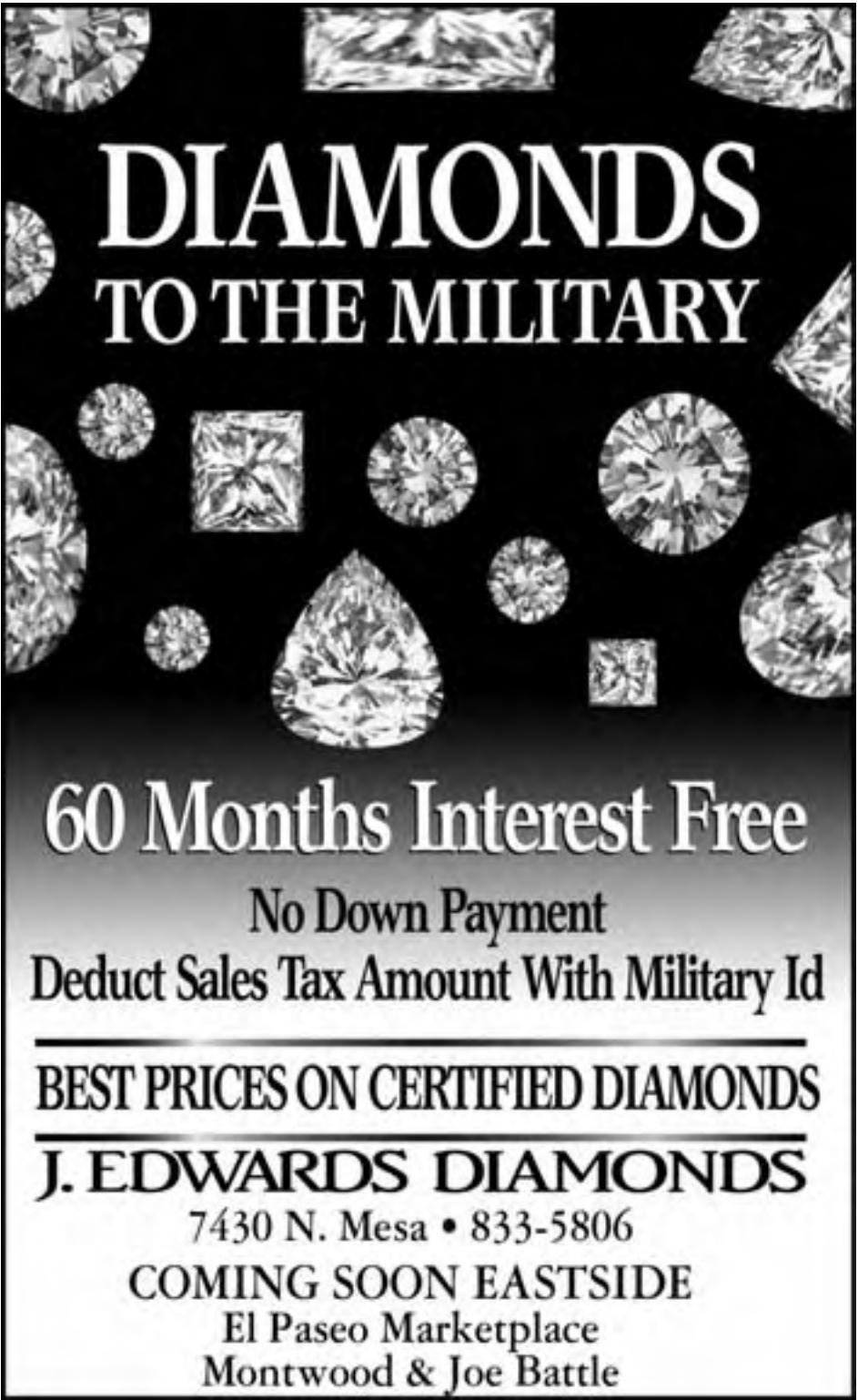
“He knew what I had to face,” she said. “He knew where I was going.”

Keller said the prospect of a long deployment didn’t discourage her.

“I wanted to try and accomplish the rest of my goal, which was to come to the service and to serve the Soldiers. I knew what the Soldiers had to go through; I saw my sons go through it, and I wanted to be here to be of service to them,” she said.

“All the way through basic training they kept emphasizing that we were going to be deployed. I was wholeheart-

See **MOM**, Page 29



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Mom

Continued from Page 28

edly engaged with the fact that I was going to serve my country, one way or the other," Keller said. "Whatever my country expected of me, that's what I was going to do."

While at Fort Stewart, Keller had another surprise in store for her. On the rifle range one day, she met the man who would become her husband.

"I wasn't looking for anybody to be my significant other when I got to Fort Stewart," she recalled.

Sgt. Kevin Keller was working safety duty on the range that day, and while he was helping her adjust the sights on her rifle, they struck up a friendship.

"He came over to me in the foxhole and said, 'What are you shooting at?' I said, 'The targets, sergeant.' He said, 'Well, you're not hitting any of them.'"

After their first meeting, she began seeing him around the motor pool; she worked there as a mechanic, and he worked as a fuel specialist. He was a sergeant and she was a private first class, which made a relationship challenging.

Though they served in separate companies in the same battalion, rules against such a relationship drew criticism from their leaders. But, Keller said, the sergeant's warmth and confidence won her over.

"He said from the first day he met me, 'You're going to marry me.' He was telling everybody," she recalled.

There was little time for courtship, though. Deployed together to Iraq, the two were stationed here with different jobs and schedules that prevented them from seeing much of each other.

Still, their relationship was the cause of talk, so in January they decided to do

something about it. Taking leave together, they went home to the United States to get married. Within two days of their arrival, they were officially husband and wife. Then, they went back to Iraq.

Serving together as newlyweds has afforded the two a unique version of marital bliss. Though they do not share living quarters and they work different hours in different places, they enjoy the moments they do spend together. They often share meals in the dining facility, and Keller frequently takes iced tea to her husband on the job.

Though their marriage so far has been spent mostly apart while serving in a combat zone, Keller said, she has not been disappointed with her deployment.

"I've enjoyed everything that I've done," she said. "I've always felt that when Soldiers accept me as working hard and getting them where they need to be, helping them accomplish their

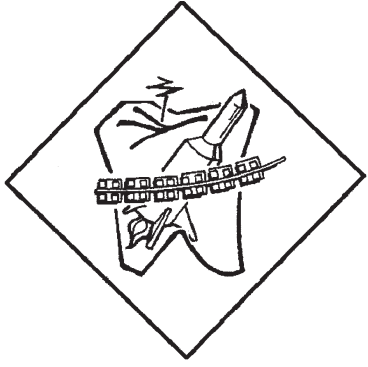
mission – that is my reward," she said.

With her two-year enlistment soon to be over, Keller said she wanted to re-enlist, "but Sergeant Keller had other plans for me," she said. "He said that since he was retiring, I would be 'retiring,' too."

The couple plans to purchase five acres of land and build their own house. Not one to shy away from a challenge, Keller said she plans to do the work herself. Her previous civilian job was as a carpenter.

Others like her shouldn't be afraid of the challenge to serve their country, she said.

"For anybody over 40 who really wants to come to the service, there is a big reward here," she explained. "You have to be open-minded; you can't come here as your own individual. You have to be willing to change, and you have to be willing to serve."



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Pilots fly Lakota to Sioux powwow

ZACH MORGAN

The Guardian

FORT POLK, La. – Fort Polk’s 5th Aviation Battalion has been flying the Army’s new utility helicopter for a year, and Sept. 22 pilots had a chance to meet the namesake of their birds, the Lakota tribe of South Dakota.

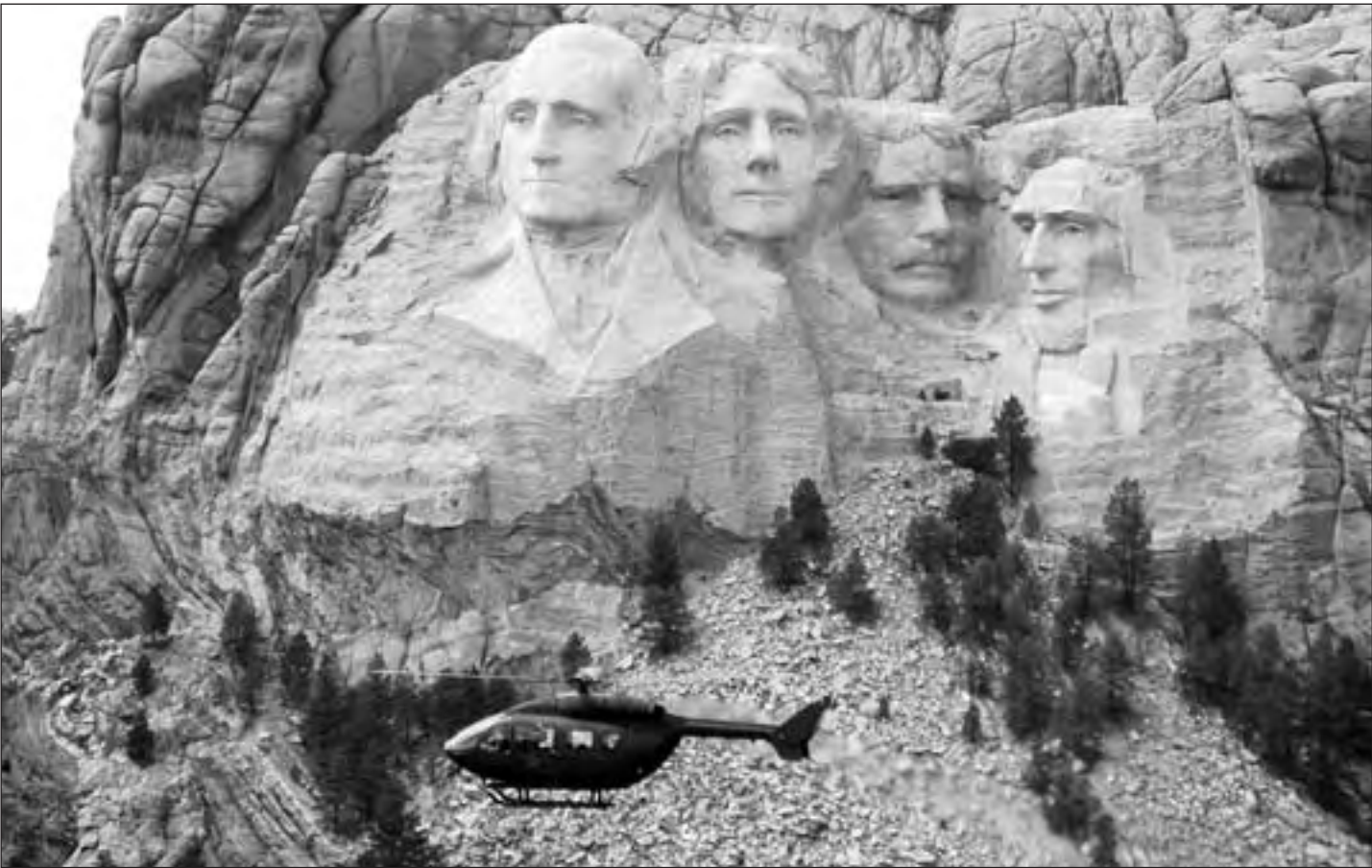
The pilots were invited to participate in the tribe’s annual sun dance, a traditional religious and cultural ceremony that honors warriors and elders of the Lakota Sioux tribe that lent its name to the UH-72 light utility helicopter.

“They wanted us to bring an aircraft up there since it was named after them, so that they could recognize it and show it off to their people,” said Chief Warrant Officer Steven Dunn, who participated in the mission.

The unit flew two helicopters to Rosebud, S.D., and displayed them at a local university and the sun dance ceremony. The pilots took the opportunity to learn more about Lakota culture. The tribe refers to its veterans as “warriors,” and regards them with the same esteem that their ancestors did centuries ago.

“Even now, when they join one of the armed forces, in their society they are considered warriors,” said Chief Warrant Officer Allen Galbreath, who also flew to the ceremony.

Today, a main focus of the gathering is the recognition of veterans. Galbreath said the pilots were invited to take part in the ceremony. “At one point we were in the arena, surrounded by the tribe. We came in with the



COURTESY PHOTO

A UH-72 Lakota light utility helicopter from Fort Polk, La., flies past Mount Rushmore on its way to the Lakota powwow in South Dakota.

dancers, who were in full regalia, and were followed by the veterans. The dancers kept pouring in; at one point there were about 300 dancers. It was wild.” The dancing lasted for hours, the pilots said.

The pilots came away from the event impressed with the patriotism of

the Lakota people. “They are probably some of the most patriotic people you will ever meet,” said Dunn. “They are so proud of their traditions and their people, but they’re proud of their country. They consider themselves Americans and part of this country. Are they still resentful of what happened to

them? Sure they are. They did not forget, because it’s handed down through their families, but they don’t turn their back on their country.”

Fortunately, the Army was able to give back to the tribe during this mission. When the tribal elders mentioned

See POWWOW, Page 31



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